DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 835 PS 018 060

AUTHOR Tangney, June Price
TITLE Shame-Proneness, Guilt-Proneness, and Interpersonal Processes.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Child Health and Human Development (NIH), Bethesda, Md.
PUB DATE Apr 89
GRANT NICHHD-IR-15-HD-25506
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Kansas City, MO, April 27-30, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Age Differences; Children; Cognitive Processes; *Emotional Development; *Emotional Experience; *Empathy; *Interpersonal Relationship; Psychological Patterns
IDENTIFIERS Developmental Patterns; *Guilt; *Shame

ABSTRACT

A series of empirical studies explored implications of shame and guilt for interpersonal relationships in childhood and adulthood. Among adults, shame experiences were rated as more painful than guilt experiences, and were clearly related to a desire to hide, to escape from interpersonal contact, and to punish others. Guilt was related to a desire to confess and, to some degree, to make amends. In contrast, older elementary school students' phenomenological ratings of shame and guilt experiences were very similar for the two emotions. Adults showed a strong positive relationship between a tendency to externalize cause or blame and proneness to shame, but no such relationship for proneness to guilt. Among children similar trends were found. When the shared variance between shame and guilt variables was factored out, shame residuals were positively correlated with externalization and guilt residuals were negatively correlated with externalization for children and adults. For adults, proneness to shame was negatively correlated with empathy, while proneness to guilt was positively associated with empathy. Among children, correlations of shame and guilt with empathy were both positive. Implications are discussed. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED309835

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Shame-Proneness, Guilt-Proneness, and Interpersonal Processes*

June Price Tangney

George Mason University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

June Price Tangney

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

*Presented at the 1989 meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Kansas City, as part of the symposium "Self-Conscious Emotions and Social Behavior", J. P. Tangney (Chair). Portions of this research were supported by Grant #IR15HD25506 from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development.

PS018060

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Shame-Proneness, Guilt-Proneness, and Interpersonal Processes

Today, I'll be focusing on some of the implications of shame and guilt for our interpersonal relationships -- both in childhood and in adulthood.

Hoffman (1982a, 1982b) and Zahn-Waxler (Zahn-Waxler, Kochanska, & Krupnick, in press; Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, in press) have suggested that guilt may serve a number of adaptive functions. Guilt and empathy, together, may motivate altruistic, prosocial behavior, while also inhibiting aggression. And there is also the sense that, in cases involving interpersonal harm, guilt more specifically motivates reparative action (Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984). In contrast, it has been suggested that the experience of shame is more likely to lead to interpersonal withdrawal or to active hostility directed toward the self or the other. In their case studies, both Helen Block Lewis (1971) and Thomas Scheff (1987) have observed that the painful experience of shame is often accompanied by a kind of humiliated fury.

Today I'll be sampling results from a series of empirical studies to underline two general themes. First, shame and guilt have important and quite different implications for interpersonal behavior. This seems to be true both when considering the states of shame and guilt, and also when considering the traits proneness to shame and proneness to guilt. Second, in comparing studies of children and adults, there appear to be some developmental shifts in the implications of shame and guilt. As conceptions of shame and guilt become more differentiated, so too do the implications of shame and guilt, particularly in the interpersonal sphere.

Let me first briefly mention some of the differences between shame and guilt because we often use these terms interchangeably. The phenomenological case studies of Janice Lindsay-Hartz (1984) and Helen Block Lewis (1971) clearly

indicate that these are distinct affective experiences. To summarize these phenomenological studies briefly, guilt is a negative emotional state involving a focus on some specific behavior -- behavior that often involves harm to someone or something. So guilt involves perception that one has done something "bad". But guilt doesn't affect one's core identity or self-concept because the focus is on the behavior somewhat apart from the self. Guilt is uncomfortable, but shame can be devastatingly painful. Shame involves less of a focus on specific behaviors, and more of a focus on the entire self. It is the entire self that is painfully scrutinized and negatively evaluated. Thus, in the shame experience, there is a considerable shift in self-perception: a sense of shrinking, of being small, a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness, and a sense of being exposed.

These are some of the phenomenological differences between shame and guilt observed in these clinical case studies. Recently, we conducted a series of quantitative studies to empirically verify the distinction made by Lewis (1971) and Lindsay-Hartz (1984). Using a method inspired by John Riskind (1988), we asked college students to describe in writing a personal shame, guilt, pride, and depression experience. We then asked participants to rate these experiences along 20 some dimensions suggested by the literature.

The results provided overwhelming support for the distinction suggested by Lewis (1971) and Lindsay-Hartz (1984). (Table 1) Shame experiences were rated as more painful than guilt experiences. They were more difficult to write about. Shame was more likely to be accompanied by sense of exposure, by a sense of being small, and by a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness. More relevant to our topic today, there were indications that shame and guilt may have a different impact on interpersonal relationships. Shame experiences were clearly related a desire to hide or to escape interpersonal contact. Guilt was

related to a desire to confess and (this was only a trend) to make amends.

These differences between shame and guilt experiences in terms of interpersonal behavior or motivation were even more striking in participants' narrative accounts. For example, an 18-year old college student shared this shame experience:

> "I'm not allowed to date. One day my mom found me kissing this guy. I felt ashamed of myself. I couldn't face my mom for months."

Here we see an example of the tendency to hide that is so often associated with the shame experience. This young woman, feeling shame, also feels moved to avoid interpersonal contact...here with her mother -- someone whom she presumably is quite close to.

Contrast this with the guilt experience related by another college student:

> "Well, there's this girl I really like. The other day at the hotel, I kind of messed around with another girl. Now I feel sort of guilty and maybe I should tell her."

This young man doesn't want to hide. In fact, he is actively debating whether to confess to the first girl -- a very different motivational picture than that observed with shame.

This study, as it turns out, was quite similar to an earlier study by Wicker and his colleagues (Wicker, Payne & Morgan, 1983). Wicker, et al. (1983) found similar support for Lewis' (1971) distinction between shame and guilt. In addition, in the Wicker et al. (1983) study, shame was related to desire to punish others. So in several studies of adults, we see indications that guilt is associated with reparative action. Shame, on other hand, may lead either to interpersonal withdrawal or to interpersonal hostility.

So far, I've been discussing studies of young adults. I'll just briefly mention that we recently completed a similar set of studies with upper elementary school children. Although the content of children's descriptions of shame and guilt situations appeared to differ somewhat, children's

phenomenological ratings of shame and guilt experiences were very similar. The rather dramatic distinction made by adults was not observed in the child sample. This similarity in children's ratings of shame and guilt experiences did not appear to be due to their ability to understand or use the rating scales. The children, for example, were able to distinguish "pride" and "happy" experiences using those same scales. One strong possibility is that shame and guilt experiences themselves are not as clearly differentiated among children as they are among adults. This is a possibility that's further supported by remainder of results I'll be presenting today.

So far, I've been talking about the states of shame and guilt, particularly the components of these states that might be relevant to interpersonal behavior. I'd like to turn next to questions concerning the traits or styles "proneness to shame" and "proneness to guilt". Does the quality of the shame-prone person's interpersonal behavior differ from the quality of the guilt-prone person's interpersonal behavior?

Several years ago, I worked with a group of graduate students at Bryn Mawr College -- Susan Burggraf, Hanne Hamme, and Barbara Domingos -- to develop a paper-and-pencil measure of proneness to shame and proneness to guilt (Tangney, Burggraf, Hamme, & Domingos, 1988). This is a scenario-based measure in which we present subjects with a series of common, day-to-day situations and ask them to rate a number of associated responses. Some of these responses sample cognitive, affective, and behavioral features associated with shame and guilt. We've conducted a series of studies which support the reliability and validity of the measure and which raise a number of interesting theoretical questions (Tangney, 1989a, 1989b; Burggraf & Tangney, 1989), but I'd like to focus on one specific set of results concerning externalization. These are results which bear on the question of shame and guilt in interpersonal relationships, and

results which also underline that a purely attributional approach really isn't sufficient to capture or explain the phenomena of shame and guilt.

Our inventory included, in addition to indices of proneness shame and guilt, a measure of externalization of cause or blame. Externalization involves attributing cause or blame to external factors -- aspects of the situation or of another person. For example, in one of our items we asked people to imagine that a friend asked a favor and that they turned the friend down. An externalization response to this scenario would be "Some people expect too much from their friends." Attribution theory would predict <u>negative</u> relationships between externalization and proneness to shame and guilt, since externalization clearly involves external attributions while shame and guilt involve internal attributions of one sort or another.

Table 2 shows the results from six independent studies. Studies 1, 2, and 3 are of college students; Study 4 involved a sample of non-college adult travelers passing through a large urban airport; the two child studies are of upper-elementary school age children, using the child version of our inventory developed by Susan Burggraf and myself. The data from the larger child sample was drawn from Susan Burggraf's Master's thesis (Burggraf, 1989).

These results are uniformly more consistent with a dynamic, motivational perspective than with an attributional perspective. On left side of the table, you can see that in each adult sample, there was a strong <u>positive</u> relationship between adults' tendency to externalize cause or blame and their proneness to shame, but no such relationship was observed for proneness to guilt. The findings in the child studies were weaker, you can still see trends in a direction consistent with the adult results.

This pattern of results is quite striking, given that the measures of proneness to shame and guilt were themselves substantially positively correlated

(about .45 in the adult samples and .66 in the child samples). But even with this positive correlation, shame and guilt were differentially related to externalization.

On the right side of the table are part correlations, where we factored out the shared variance between shame and guilt. Here you can see an even more clear-cut pattern of results: Shame residuals were positively correlated with externalization. Guilt residuals were negatively correlated with externalization. And these findings were equally strong for children and adults.

This link between shame reactions and externalization of blame is consistent with Lewis' (1971) and Scheff's (1987) description of rage or the humiliated fury that often accompanies shame. We've already seen that shame is generally a more painful experience than guilt. A person suffering from a painful shame experience may be particularly motivated to make use of hostile or defensive maneuvers somewhat akin to externalization. One of our participants' shame descriptions illustrates this nicely. A 42-year old executive shared this shame experience:

> "I did something I knew was wrong and a friend confronted me.
> I wanted to blame him for the awkwardness of the situation...
> even though I knew I was at fault..."

So this gentleman was inclined to <u>externalize</u> blame for the situation. Although he <u>knew</u> he was wrong, he wanted to blame his friend "for the awkwardness of the situation"...and I read that as "for the painfulness of the situation". The shame/externalization link appears to be something like: "Oh, what a horrible person I am...and DAMN IT how could you make me feel that way!"

This projection outward may lessen the pain of shame in the very short run, but it's likely to be pretty irrational, and destructive to our interpersonal relationships. Defensive externalization may lead either to withdrawal from the blamed person, or to the hostile, humiliated fury described by Lewis (1971) and Scheff (1987).

The link between shame and externalization raise some more general questions about the interpersonal sensitivity of the shame-prone person. The last set of result I'd like to consider today concern the interrelationship of shame, guilt, and empathy.

Empathy is often viewed as the "good" cognitive/affective capacity or experience. There's a vast literature indicating that empathy facilitates altruistic, helping and/or prosocial behavior; that it fosters warm, close interpersonal relationships; and that it inhibits interpersonal aggression (Feshbach, 1987; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988).

Empathy is, in essence, the vicarious sharing of another person's emotional experience, and it requires a number of interrelated skills or capacities. First, there is the ability to take another's perspective -- a role-taking capacity. This is primarily a cognitive skill. Second, there is the ability to discriminate or to read accurately another person's particular emotional experience. Norma Feshbach (in press) terms this "affective cue discrimination". This is another predominantly cognitive skill. Finally, there is the ability to actually experience a range of emotions oneself, since empathy involves sharing the other's affective experience in one form or another. This is primarily an affective capacity. Norma Feshbach has developed empathy measures for children and adults which tap each of these dimensions. We included Feshbach's Empathy Scales (Feshbach & Lipian, 1987; Lipian & Feshbach, 1987) in a number of the studies I've already discussed. How might we expect this "good" cognitive/ affective capacity to relate to shame and guilt?

Table 3 shows the relationship of Feshbach's empathy measure to indices of proneness to shame and guilt in two independent samples of college adults and two independent samples of upper elementary school-age children. I'll talk first about the results for adults. You can see that, among adults, proneness

to shame was generally negatively correlated with empathy while proneness to guilt was positively associated with empathy -- again, a striking pattern given that there was a substantial positive correlation between the shame and guilt measures themselves. On the right side of Table 3, you can see the part correlations where we factored out the shared variance between shame and guilt. These results are even more clear-cut: Shame residuals were very negatively correlated with empathy; guilt residuals were positively correlated with empathy. And I should mention that these correlations are not an artifact of gender differences in the variables of interest. This pattern of results was quite similar across male and female subsamples.

The results from the child studies tell another story entirely. The correlations of shame and guilt with empathy were very similar -- both positive.

Well, what do these results mean? We've seen consistent evidence that shame and guilt are distinct affective experiences for adults. Among adults, shame is an ugly feeling. It involves a marked self-focus. That is, it draws the focus away from the distressed other, back to the self. It is extremely painful. And as we saw, shame can lead to interpersonal withdrawal or to externalization and humiliated fury. Each of these features of shame that we've been discussing -- the extreme pain, the acute self-focus, the interpersonal withdrawal, the externalization and the humiliated fury -- each of these features are incompatible with a continued empathic connection. A shame-prone adult is not an empathic adult.

Guilt on the other hand is a bad feeling, but it's not ugly. It's uncomfortable enough to motivate us to repair, to undo or to make amends. But it's not aversive enough to squelch our empathic tendencies.

So among adults, shame and guilt are clearly differentiated experiences with very different implications for interpersonal relations. In contrast, the child empathy data suggest that shame and guilt are less clearly differentiated

among children. When faced with negative interpersonal events, empathic children are likely to feel badly -- period. They are as likely to feel shame as guilt.

This is just one piece of converging evidence that shame and guilt are not clearly differentiated among children -- at least among 4th, 5th, and 6th grade children. Children's phenomenological descriptions of shame and guilt experiences do not differ very much (in contrast to those of adults). Using an entirely different methodology, our indices of proneness to shame and guilt were much more highly correlated among children than among adults. And not surprisingly, these measures of children's shame and guilt do not differentially relate to other constructs of interest -- at least not in the clear-cut manner observed among adults.

Shame is clearly an ugly feeling among adults. The interesting question for future research is at what point in late childhood or early adolescence does shame become that dark shadow in our interpersonal relationships?

References

Burggraf, S. A. (1989). Assessing children's self-conscious emotional style: Reliability and validity of the SCAAI-C. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Bryn Mawr College.

Eisenberg, N., & Miller, P. A. (1987). Empathy, sympathy and altruism: Empirical and conceptual links. In N. Eisenberg & J. Strayer (Eds.), Empathy and its development (pp. 292-316). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Feshbach, N. D. (in press). The construct of empathy and the phenomenon of physical maltreatment of children. In D. Cicchetti & V. Carlson (Eds.), Theoretical and research properties of child maltreatment

Feshbach, N. D. (1987). Parental empathy and child adjustment/maladjustment. In N. Eisenberg & J. Strayer (Eds.), Empathy and its development (pp. 271-291). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Feshbach, N. D., & Lipian, M. (1987). The Empathy Scale for Adults. Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles.

Hoffman, M. L. (1982a). Affect and moral development. In D. Cicchetti, & P. Hesse (Eds.), New directions for child development: Emotional development.

Hoffman, M. L. (1982b). Development of prosocial motivation: Empathy and guilt. In N. Eisenberg-Berg (Ed.), Development of prosocial behavior. New York: Academic Press.

Lewis, H. B. (1971). Shame and guilt in neurosis. New York: International Universities Press.

Lindsay-Hartz, J. (1984). Contrasting experiences of shame and guilt. American Behavioral Scientist, 27, 689-704.

Lipian, M., & Feshbach, N. D. (1987). Empathy Scale for Children. University of California, Los Angeles.

Miller, P. A., & Eisenberg, N. (1988). The relation of empathy to aggressive

and externalizing/antisocial behavior. Psychological Bulletin, 103, 324-344.

Scheff, T. J. (1987). The shame-rage spiral: A case study of an interminable quarrel. In H. B. Lewis (Ed.), The role of shame in symptom formation (pp. 109-149). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Tangney, J. P. (1989a). Assessing individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt: Development of the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory. Under review.

Tangney, J. P. (1989b). Moral affect: The good, the bad, and the ugly. Under review.

Tangney, J. P., Burggraf, S. A., Hamme, H., & Domingos, B. (1988). Assessing individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt: The Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory. Poster presented at the meetings of the Eastern Psychological Association, Buffalo, NY.

Wicker, F. W., Payne, G. C., & Morgan, R. D. (1983). Participant descriptions of guilt and shame. Motivation and Emotion, 7, 25-39.

Zahn-Waxler, C., Kochanska, G. (in press). The origins of guilt. In R. Thompson (Ed.), Thirty-sixth Annual Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Socioemotional Development. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Zahn-Waxler, C., Kochanska, G., & Krupnick, J. (in press). Patterns of guilt in children of depressed and well mothers. Developmental Psychology.

TABLE 1

Adults' Phenomenological Ratings of Personal Shame and Guilt Experiences

Dimension	Shame	Guilt	t-value
Felt Bad During Experience	5.41 (0.84)	4.95 (1.28)	2.37*
Writing Situation was Difficult	3.79 (2.12)	3.31 (1.45)	1.71*
Felt People Were Looking at Me	5.30 (1.82)	4.22 (2.02)	3.79***
Focused on What I Thought of Myself (vs. Others' Opinions)	3.11 (2.23)	4.02 (2.30)	2.50**
Felt Physically Smaller	5.23 (1.56)	4.76 (1.47)	1.99*
Felt in Control of the Situation	2.47 (1.67)	3.56 (2.18)	2.90***
Felt Superior To Others	2.57 (1.36)	3.34 (1.52)	3.83***
Desire to Hide	5.86 (1.37)	4.89 (1.72)	4.61***
Desire to Make Amends	4.68 (2.21)	5.11 (1.79)	1.37
Wanted to Admit What I'd Done	2.73 (1.85)	3.15 (2.05)	1.94*
Wished I Had Acted Differently	5.90 (1.72)	5.33 (2.23)	1.70[a]
The Emotion Had a Sudden Onset	4.94 (2.12)	4.44 (2.02)	1.44
Felt Responsible for What Happened	6.00 (1.65)	5.84 (1.54)	0.66

Note: N = 60-65. $p<.05$* $p<.01$** $p<.001$*** Items were rated on a 1-7 scale. One-tailed t-tests were conducted to test a priori hypotheses.
[a] Difference is beyond chance, but in direction opposite from a priori hypothesis.

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Adults' Phenomenological Ratings of Personal Shame and Guilt Experiences

Dimension	Shame	Guilt	t-value
Time Moved Quickly	2.59 (1.84)	3.43 (1.89)	2.63**
Viewed My Actions (vs. Self) as Bad	4.66 (2.13)	4.50 (2.13)	0.49
Felt Isolated From Others	5.19 (1.70)	4.22 (1.84)	3.48***
The Emotion Lasted a Short Time	2.46 (1.70)	2.81 (1.76)	1.23
Felt I Had Violated a Moral Standard	4.87 (2.12)	4.17 (2.29)	2.41[a]
Physically Changes (Sweating, Blushing)	4.87 (1.95)	4.47 (2.12)	1.18
Knew the Reasoning Behind My Actions	4.40 (2.30)	4.68 (2.22)	0.78
My Feelings (vs. Thoughts) Were Important	4.78 (1.86)	4.68 (1.73)	0.40
Memory of Event was More Visual (vs. Auditory)	2.73 (1.90)	2.87 (1.79)	0.46

Note: N = 60-65. $p<.05$* $p<.01$** $p<.001$*** Items were rated on a 1-7 scale. One-tailed t-tests were conducted to test a priori hypotheses.
[a] Difference is beyond chance, but in direction opposite from a priori hypothesis.

Table 2

Relationship of Externalization to Shame-Proneness and Guilt-Proneness in Four Independent Studies of Adults and Two Studies of Children

	Bivariate Correlations		Part Correlations	
Externalization	Shame	Guilt	Shame Residuals	Guilt Residuals
Adult Study 1 (n=101)	.55***	.13	.55***	-.12
Adult Study 2 (n=98)	.39***	-.08	.49***	-.31**
Adult Study 3 (n=63)	.23+	-.21	.36**	-.35**
Adult Study 4 (n=77)	.32**	-.05	.38***	-.20+
Child Study 1 (n=20)	.06	-.36	.38*	-.52**
Child Study 2 (n=108)	.17+	-.12	.35***	-.33***

Note: $p<.10$+ $p<.05$* $p<.01$** $p<.001$***

Table 3

Relationship of Empathy to Shame-Proneness and Guilt-Proneness in Two Studies of Adults and Two Studies of Children

	Bivariate Correlations		Part Correlations	
Feshbach Empathy	Shame	Guilt	Shame Residuals	Guilt Residuals
Adult Studies (n=99 and n=97)				
General Empathy	.06 .08	.39*** .13	-.14 .02	.41*** .10
Cognitive Empathy	-.26** -.27**	.21* .07	-.41*** -.35***	.38*** .23*
Emotional Empathy	-.11 -.22*	.03 -.05	-.14 -.23*	.09 .07
Affective Cue Discrimination	-.36*** -.34***	.00 -.14	-.42*** -.31**	.21* .03
Total Empathy	-.20 -.25*	.22* .01	-.34*** -.29**	.36*** .15
Child Studies (n=20 and n=104)				
Total Empathy	.46 .45***	.65** .40***	.07 .23*	.46* .14

Note: $p<.05$* $p<.01$** $p<.001$***